



May 26, 2022

The Honorable Dick Durbin
Chairman
Senate Committee on the Judiciary
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Grassley
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on the Judiciary
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Frank Pallone, Jr.
Chairman
House Committee on Energy & Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Ranking Member
House Committee on Energy & Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Janice Schakowsky
Chairwoman
House Committee on Energy & Commerce
Consumer Protection & Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Gus Bilirakis
Ranking Member
House Committee on Energy & Commerce
Consumer Protection & Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Chairs Durbin, Pallone, and Schakowsky and Ranking Members Grassley, McMorris Rodgers, and Bilirakis:

The Public Lands Council (PLC), National Cattlemen’s Beef Association (NCBA), American Sheep Industry Association (ASI), American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF), and American Quarter Horse Association (AQHA) strongly oppose S. 2732, the John Stringer Rainey Save America’s Forgotten Equines (SAFE) Act and H.R. 3355, the Save America’s Forgotten Equines (SAFE) Act of 2021.

As organizations representing a wide variety of agricultural producers, livestock producers, and horse owners, our opposition to the bill is rooted in our commitment to the responsible stewardship of America’s equines and natural resources. PLC is the only national organization dedicated solely to representing the ranchers who hold roughly 22,000 federal grazing permits and operate on federal lands. NCBA is the U.S. cattle industry’s oldest and largest national trade association, representing 44 state affiliate organizations and roughly 26,000 individual producers who provide much of the nation’s food supply and own or manage a large portion of America’s private property. ASI is a national federation of 45 state sheep associations that has represented the interests of the 100,000 sheep ranchers who produce America’s lamb and wool since 1865. AFBF is the nation’s largest general farm organization, representing the interests of agricultural producers in both livestock and crop production in every state as well as Puerto Rico. AQHA is the largest Equine Breed Registry in the world with a primary mission to record and preserve the pedigree of the American Quarter Horse while maintaining the integrity of the breed and welfare of its horses.

Horse processing facilities in the United States were closed in 2007, after funding for U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) inspection of the plants and inspection of horses in transit for slaughter was halted in the Fiscal Year 2006 appropriations bill. Proponents of the appropriations provision to end horse processing bypassed the normal legislative process, and an abundance of unforeseen consequences have been harming domestic horse welfare ever since.

Horse owners must have a means of humanely dealing with equines at the end of their lives. Costly veterinarian euthanasia services and remains disposal are affordable to only a fraction of the population.

When the appropriations rider removed the option of domestic horse slaughter, an increasing number of animals ended up in inhumane circumstances at the end of their lives or at the point when an owner was unable to continue providing care. A 2011 report submitted to Congress by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) concluded that horse welfare in the U.S. had generally declined since 2007. After the prohibition took effect, the GAO found a documented increase in horse abandonments and investigations into abuse and neglect. Some unwanted horses are exported for slaughter in Mexico and Canada; the prohibition on domestic processing has ensured that horses being processed must be transported significantly longer distances, increasing stress and welfare concerns. The appropriations ban on inspection of these horses prior to slaughter has impeded USDA's ability to properly ensure horse welfare prior to leaving the country.

It is important to note that the perception of a "slaughter pipeline" to these countries is inaccurate; according to USDA, horse exports for slaughter to Mexico and Canada declined by roughly 17 percent and 74 percent respectively between 2015 to 2018. The extreme rhetoric used by proponents of the bill to gin up fears about a growing flood of exports to slaughter is unfounded, and promoting this narrative is irresponsible. However, it is also undeniable that the ban on domestic processing has led to more horses enduring situations of neglect, abandonment, and lengthy transport at the end of their lives.

In addition to harming domesticated horses in private care, the SAFE Act is a back-door means of codifying the ban on processing wild horses and burros in the care of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and U.S Forest Service (USFS). The Wild and Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 empowers the agencies to use the humane slaughter of equids as a tool for population management [16 U.S.C. § 1333(b)(2)(C)]. It also allows for the sale of excess wild equids for the ultimate purpose of destruction into commercial products [16 U.S.C. § 1331(e)(2) et seq.]. Provisions in appropriations bills over the past several years have trampled on the agencies' legal authority, prohibiting processing or sale where processing is the ultimate end.

BLM and USFS are struggling each year to responsibly manage our natural resources, combatting the severe stress and degradation of range and water resources that has resulted from the overpopulation of wild horses and burros. BLM estimates the current population of wild horse and burros on the range at 82,384 as of March 1, 2022. The Appropriate Management Level (AML) is 26,785, meaning there are tens of thousands of horses and burros currently relying on forage and water resources that can only support a fraction of that number. This has resulted in an environmental crisis, as rangelands are overgrazed, and a horse welfare crisis, as animals die of thirst, starvation, and conflict with other horses. In addition, as of April 2022, there are 58,942 animals that BLM removed from the range that are being held in public and private off-range corrals and pastures. Clearly, this situation is unsustainable. Taking tools off the table and preventing the BLM and USFS from protecting animal welfare, maintaining multiple use on public lands, and rehabilitating damaged rangelands in a time of drought is wildly irresponsible.

The undersigned groups remain committed to reversing wild horse and burro population growth and reaching AML through the nonlethal strategies outlined in the Path Forward agreement – a document endorsed by livestock, land management, and animal advocacy stakeholders. The strategy is based in the acknowledgement that there must be a variety of tools in the toolbox to manage domestic horse populations, and as a result, the undersigned organizations do not support a Congressionally directed, wholesale ban on horse processing. We remain confident that the Path Forward strategy, if adequately funded by Congress and properly implemented by the BLM, will be successful in its mission, but success will be undermined should Congress eliminate tools for all horse owners, nationwide.

American agriculture depends upon an economically viable and healthy horse industry, as well as a system that offers responsible management options and a humane end of life for unwanted horses. The SAFE Act will create an animal welfare crisis and a massive contraction of the U.S. equine industry, which currently contributes \$122 billion annually to the U.S. economy.

Decisions about animal welfare should be based on solid scientific facts and sound animal husbandry, not merely on emotion. The humane processing of horses is upheld by the American Association of Equine Practitioners and the American Veterinary Medical Association. Without this option, unwanted horses will

be subject to a continued life of discomfort, pain, inadequate care or abandonment. The SAFE Act is incompatible with the professional opinions of animal welfare experts and the members of the undersigned organizations who have dedicated their careers to sound animal husbandry, and it is incompatible with the responsibility we have to our nation's equines. We urge your opposition to H.R. 3355 and S.2732.

Sincerely,

American Farm Bureau Federation
American Quarter Horse Association
American Sheep Industry Association
National Cattlemen's Beef Association
Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association
Public Lands Council